

Leaving Your First Love

by Phil Beach Jr.

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a deep and passionate love for the Lord, and warns against the danger of leaving that first love, which can lead to a mechanical and lifeless walk with God.

Scripture: Jeremiah 2:2, Matthew 26:41, John 7:38, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Revelation 2:4-5, Revelation 2:7, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "First Love", "Repentance"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches on the message from the book of Revelation where Jesus commends and condemns the church in Ephesus for leaving their first love. Despite their commendable qualities of hard work, endurance, and discernment against false teachings, they were rebuked for losing their passionate love for Christ. The sermon emphasizes the importance of remembering and repenting from falling out of first love, as failing to do so could lead to losing the presence and blessing of the Lord. The final encouragement is to listen to the Spirit's voice, repent, and seek restoration to experience the joy and selfless love that comes from being fully restored to the Lord.

Transcript

...I Have Somewhat Against You Because You Have Left Your

First Love...

Rev. 2:4b. Jesus tells us that a true Shepherd loves His sheep and is willing to give His life for them. Our heavenly Shepherd has done this very thing for us by dying for our sins and not only ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. This is a picture of God's great love. Many years after Paul had died, around the turn of the first century, the Lord Jesus chose His servant John for a very special assignment. Jesus, the true lover and Savior of the church, had a final message that He wanted to give to His followers.

This message was called "The Revelation of Jesus Christ" and later was called the book of Revelation, the last book in our Bible. In this final book to the church, the Lord Jesus speaks directly to His servant John with a very specific message for each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Let's focus for a short time on the message our Lord had for the church that lived in Ephesus. We will discover that even though this church received several words of commendation from her Lord, there was one fault in the midst that was so serious that it threatened to be the ruin of its very existence!

Today, we can learn a great lesson from this message from the Lord to this church. Remember, everything the Lord says to us springs out of the deep, pure love He has for us. Even when His words hurt us and make us feel sad or even get us angry, we must remember that it is love that moves Him to speak. May the Lord give us tender and honest hearts as we read His words and help us to receive His correction that He gives through them. Jesus Stands In the Midst of His Church The scripture we are looking at begins the address of our Lord to His seven churches.

But before we look at His words to this church, it is important to note that Jesus is described as standing in the midst of the seven churches. This speaks of several important points that need to be mentioned. Firstly, it tells us that this message that Jesus spoke to His church in Ephesus applies not only to those at the time of His appearing to John, but to all saints, up to this present time, including us! These churches were representative of others, having characteristics common to many.

By addressing these churches and pointing out the commendable as well as the condemnable qualities in each, our Lord has pictured the entire church, throughout the church age. In this way, we can read the message to each church and at the same time be ourselves corrected and commended. The message given to these seven churches has a very personal application to all of us. As the One who stands in our midst, Christ is prepared to search our hearts as His Word is pondered and heeded.

Also, Christ in the midst of His church reminds us of the sobering fact that He sees all and knows all that is going on, not only what can be seen, but what is hidden to the human eye as well. He is present as the great Shepherd prepared to lead us and teach us about His ways and will. He is present to be our light in the midst of darkness and to help us along the path He leads us on. Now, let's look at this church in Ephesus and in particular, the piercing Words of our Lord revealing their great deficiency.

Christ Commends His Followers To begin with, Jesus mentions five features in this church that He commends. Firstly, the Lord commended them because they worked hard for Him. Actually, the Greek word means to labor to sheer exhaustion so as to become weary and tired. This is a great quality to possess. How nice to be filled with desire to work for our Lord and spend our energy on things that help His kingdom and build up His body. Secondly, He mentioned that the church patiently endured under trial and temptation.

These believers relied on the Lord's help during times of testing so that they did not cave in under the pressure to give up. Such a quality won the attention and approval of the Lord. We need the Lord to give us this quality so that we too may endure under testing and be found faithful to Him. Additionally, the church could not bear or put up with those who practiced evil or claimed to be apostles but after being tested were found to be false. Like this church, we must learn to hate evil and not allow its influence to gain any hold in our lives, in our family's life or the life of the church.

Many claim today to be apostles, sent by God to the church. However, after careful investigation they prove to be false apostles who are only after our money and the building up of their own personal kingdoms. These early believers were not fooled by this and refused to give any recognition to such men. It is very important that we learn to resist any form of false teaching that is not in accord to the apostles' doctrine. We must ask the Lord to give us a hatred for all sin and not allow it to have any place in our hearts.

Only as we live in the light of the Lamb and daily walk in His Word can we be sure to stay guarded against evil and false teachers and apostles. Lastly, the Lord commends this group of believers for not fainting but

having the grace to patiently endure in their walk with the Lord. They kept doing what was right even when they were not rewarded for it. Sometimes we are tempted to stop living for others and doing what is right in the Lord's eyes because we are not rewarded in this life.

We are tempted to faint and become weary of serving others in love and thinking of others needs and not just our own. But these followers of the Lamb did not faint and for that they were commended. Christ Condemns His Followers After mentioning some very attractive qualities that these believers possessed, the Lord condemns and warns them of one very big fault in their midst. It is interesting to note that even though we may possess lots of good qualities, the Lord is also aware of our faults and will not hesitate to show them to us.

This fault was so offensive to the Lord that He warns them that it could cause them to lose their standing with Him as a light in their community. Even so, today, we may find the Lord able to commend us about some good qualities of grace in our lives. Maybe we, like these Ephesian believers, have learned to hate evil and false teachers, are learning to endure under trials and tests, and to serve others in love. That is all very good, but we are not exempt from rebuke and the danger of being set aside as a light in our community if we are guilty of the same sin as they were and fail to repent.

Jesus tells this church that the one thing he had against them was that they had left their first love. This was a very serious charge. Because of the seriousness of the penalty for this sin, we would do well to ponder soberly whether we ourselves have lost our first love. What is the meaning of "first love"? Let us look for a moment at what this phrase could mean. Paul tells the church in Corinth that he has espoused them to the Lord and wanted them to be presented to the Lord as a chaste virgin, pure and spotless.

When God spoke to His ancient people by the prophet Jeremiah, he reminded them of the day when they were in the wilderness. He looked at them as those who were espoused to Him, as being prepared for marriage. At that time He saw in them the tender heart for Him, especially how they were seeking hard after Him in the wilderness. By these and other passages in God's Word, we can see that "first love" is the love that is born in our hearts during the time when we are first after the Lord.

It is a love that longs for the day when we shall be married to Him and become one, in the fullest sense. First love has for its chief work and quality a deep longing and passion for the object of its affection and longs for the highest form of intimacy, which cannot be realized until the marriage day. First love then is the quality of possessing an insatiable passion for wanting to know the Lord and wanting the Lord alone, as opposed to wanting something from the Lord or wanting to work for Him.

This church had lost this first love passion for their Lord. Yes, they were very busy for Him; serving others nicely, resisting evil courageously and enduring under severe trial and test. But Christ, as the object of their passion, had been lost. Although engaged to their heavenly Lord, and busily working for Him and serving one another, they were no longer after Him, wanting to know Him and longing for His appearing; so that they could be fully and finally one with Him, in mind, soul and body.

In this condition it is possible to begin to love the work of the Lord and even feel good about ourselves because of the work we are doing for the Lord, yet fall out of love with the Lord Himself. Because of this, Christ was very sad and considered this to be a leaven of evil in their midst that had the potential to disqualify them from being a light in the city of Ephesus. This is a very challenging rebuke from the Lord to us all. Are we like these believers? Have we focused on working for the Lord, serving our families and fellow brothers and sisters but yet, at the same time, have we fallen from our first love?

We may love being busy for God and not really love God Himself! If so, we too must take heed to the Lord's counsel that He gives to these dear loved ones of His. A Call to Remember and Repent Whenever believers fall from their first love and stray from possessing a passion for the Lord, God will call them to both remember their first love and to repent from falling from it. One translation says, "Remember the height from which you have fallen". God wants us to remember the deep love and longing we had in our hearts when we first discovered His love for us as well as those feelings of joy and longing we had in looking forward to when we would see the Lord face to face!

In those early days, we were not after what our Lord could do for us or what He could give to us. Instead, we were after Him alone. It was just knowing and loving Him that our hearts longed for. God says to remember that and to repent from having fallen from such heights! Are we prepared to confess our backslidden hearts before the Lord and admit that our hearts often are cold and that we, like the believers in Ephesus, have fallen from the first love that so captured them in early times.

We desperately need the Lord to pour out a fresh and living revelation of His great love upon us and once again capture our hearts with this love that is so attractive to Him. Sometimes this will require that we turn from things that have stolen our hearts. That may include even some good things, if we have become attached to them too deeply. Perhaps something has become so big in your life that you are now obsessed with this thing and your heart has grown cold towards the Lord.

This can very easily happen to us because of our weakness and tendency to stray and wander. Jesus said that the spirit in us is willing to do the Lord's will but our flesh is weak and powerless. If we do not stay in a constant attitude of prayer and feel our deep need for the Lord every day, we will fall from our first love and become guilty of this horrible sin. Often a sure sign that we have lost our first love is that our life and service to the Lord becomes mechanical, lifeless and dull, lacking the element of life, heavenly joy and deep peace.

There is a deep lack of the presence of Christ in our homes, in our gatherings and in our daily living too. Our entire walk with the Lord is reduced to forms, principles, rules and traditions that we keep, week after week with very little vital, living communion with the Risen Lord. Jesus makes it very clear that if this condition is not corrected and we fail to admit to our true state, then we will suffer the loss of His presence in our midst--the removal of our candlestick.

If our Lord's presence and life are removed from our lives and gatherings, we have nothing left but outward form, beloved! Outward form with no inward life from the Lord is not God's thought and will not result in the Lord's blessing. In this state, our hearts grow distant from the Lord and one another and body life comes to an end. Oh, may the Lord help us to come back to Him and find grace and mercy at His feet, as we look to Him for both forgiveness as well as guidance to lead us back to living in the passion of first love before Him.

A Final Word of Encouragement from the Risen Lord Finally, at the end of this Word to His church, our Lord says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." God repeatedly tells His followers to listen to His voice and obey His Words. We must pray for the Lord to give us ears to hear His Spirit. Many voices are seeking to win our hearts' attention in this hour we live in. But only one voice is important and our Lord tells us it is the voice of His Spirit, speaking to us from His precious Word.

Are we hearing His Spirit speak to us today? Sometimes we like to think we are hearing what God is saying to our friend, or to the pastor or our husbands or wives. But are we hearing what God is saying to

our own hearts? Sometimes I meet people who seem to know all about what God is saying to other people, but very few times do they like to talk about what God is saying to them. Many times over the years, lots of people have come to me and told me what God was saying to them about me, pointing out my sins to me or at least what they perceived them to be.

But almost without exception, those very people never came to me and confessed their own sins, asking me to pray for them because they were hearing God's Spirit reprove them about their faults. So, dear friend, it would be to our advantage to ask the Lord to deliver us from seeing others' faults and to help us to hear Him tell us about our own faults, and in particular, this fault of leaving our first love. Should we hear Him and turn to Him in deep repentance, He will have mercy on us and heal our backslidden hearts.

It would be so wonderful should the Lord help us to repent, together, as a people who are in need of His grace and mercy. Then, together, we can experience the joy and subsequent songs of praise that come to those who are restored back to their Lord with the heavenly passion of hearts filled with their first love. As the life of our Lord is restored in our midst, caring for one another will blossom. Body life will flourish and the increase of God's love will abound, being seen in selfless living to the Lord and one another.

Each member of the body, moved by God's love, will seek one another out and will have something of the Lord's life and love to contribute, so that everyone is participating in each other's lives in a living way. To such the Lord will grant rivers of living water that will quench their deepest longings and satisfy their every need. Father, thank you for your great love that has reached down into our lives. Give us the grace and humility to receive your words to our hearts today and restore us back to our first love. Amen.

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